THE WRITINGS

BOOK II

On the LOGOS

I. THE LOGOS

There are those who say that the LOGOS is nothing more than a shelf of old books, gathered by men long after the events they describe, written in their various lifetimes and often contradicting one another in their lesser details, and that to call such a shelf sacred is to attribute human invention to a divine origin it does not possess. Let us attempt to answer this accusation, for it is not made out of malice alone, but is prompted by the very sight of the shelf, upon which one sees many books and few faces.

Do they not understand that a river may be drawn up in many vessels, at many places along its banks, by men who have never laid eyes on one another and live and die in the same country, and that the contents of these vessels, however various, are one and the same water, drawn from one source? The LOGOS is not the source. The source is Aletheia, Truth, which is properly and solely Divine; but the LOGOS is the vessel in which this water has been brought to those who could not approach the source, and this is why the LOGOS most particularly must not be adored as if it, too, were Divine, nor despaired of solely because it had been carried in many vessels by many hands before reaching the reader. How, indeed, could the writings of Homer and the laws of various legislators possibly be applied to one LOGOS, one system of things?

They are united by one source. They carry one truth, however variously applied it may be; this is why the LOGOS is not spread out in one continuous piece like a parchment of old times, but has different parts, one closer to the spring and one further away, just as one finds the different levels of truth in the writings of various authors. The closest to the source are the Revelation and Inspiration, in which the oldest and most direct transmission of what was received from the Gods is carried; followed by the Sacred Continuation, in which the same truth has been carried further away, taking more time to reach the reader, having passed through more hands. But beneath both levels are the Hellenic Fathers, who took from these writings what nourishment they could and carried it further, interpreted it, defended it, demonstrated its truth and resisted those who would soil it, mistaking it, or denying it altogether.

Therefore let those who would drink from the well of Truth understand that when we speak of the LOGOS we do not speak of books, as the careless modern term “literature” would have it, nor of simple myths, as if myth-making were only a children's tale, but that we speak of a whole which the Gods have given us most painstakingly, transmitted most patiently through tradition, and received most joyfully by those who knew how to listen.

II. THE SCRIPTURES

How, indeed, could writings so different from one another be part of one LOGOS — the songs of warriors and kings, the farmer's knowledge of the land and of the right days to work it, the priests' hymns and dark sayings and the laws carved on stone for the guidance of cities? Are they not the words of men who pursued utterly different aims, using utterly different means?

Homer sings of the deeds of Gods and heroes, but in doing so most particularly shows how the divine order weaves into the lot of men, whether hero or slave, in war, in exile, in the return home after bitter wanderings; the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, along with the cycle of songs surrounding them and completing the story of Troy from its birth to its fall, show how the Gods' order encompasses human life in all its vastness and depth, from the might of Gods to the sorrow of men and the long road back to one's homeland.

Hesiod's poems, in their turn, sing of what happened before all men and Gods, of the creation of the universe out of nothing, but then proceed immediately to describe the most ordinary days of the farmer, the right times for plowing and reaping, thus showing that the same order governs all things, the least of which no man should scorn.

Orpheus' verse sings, deeper than all of them, not of Gods or men but of the human heart, its creation, its travels and sufferings, its purification and fate when freed from mortal limits; Musaeus, said to have followed Orpheus, carries the same theme into sacred hymns and mysteries; Linus, the first to give shape and harmony to poetry and said to have taught others greater than himself, carries the same theme into the realm of sorrow and shows that even the saddest lot can be part of the divine order and has its appointed place in human life.

Apart from the first Revelation, there is the Sacred Continuation, which carries the same theme further, showing that the spring of Aletheia had not failed when the first bards fell silent. The Apollonian oracles, carried by the Sibyl, by Bakis, and written down in verse by Aristeas, show that the Gods continued to speak to men, guiding them, as only they can, through the years, through centuries, through everything that was not foreseen in the first Revelation. The Demeteric tradition, carried by Triptolemus at Eleusis, watches over the most personal and intimate of all things, the transition of the soul after death, guarding it, as it does so most particularly by silence, from those unworthy of knowing. The Zeusian tradition, in its turn, preserves the purifications said to have been instituted by Epimenides and the laws once given to Minos, showing how the divine order watches over cities and nations, keeping them from falling into ruin, bloodshed, and impurity, and raising them up again when these miseries have passed. The Divine Law, finally, as seen in the Rhetra said to have been written at Delphi for the institution of Sparta and in the laws of Zaleucus, shows that the same divine order regulates the life of men living together, not as individuals but as cities and peoples, expressing how even human justice is but a part of the whole.

Do they not see that just as one man's body consists of many parts, some serving to see and some to walk, all most different but forming one whole? So is the LOGOS one, consisting of many parts most unlike one another but all necessary for the full expression of divine order, which is why no man, no war, no death, no city must be left outside of it.

III. INTERPRETATION

But here there arises a most dangerous heresy, which most frequently takes two forms, most frequently opposed to one another but equally faulty: some would read the LOGOS as if it were all bare statement, as if the Gods spoke only of things known, holding only to the facts as one might describe the movements of an army, and so these readers most frequently find themselves questioning everything stated by the Gods, most frequently attributing to them what can be most frequently only human, and so fall into one of two most frequently opposite pitfalls: either explaining away the Gods or denying them altogether. Others, having seen this error and sought most particularly to avoid it, run most frequently into the opposite heresy of claiming that the Gods are no better than men, that Zeus is only the sky and nothing more, that Aphrodite is only the name for love, and so, most frequently most shamefully stripping the Gods of all meaning, find themselves most frequently left only with winds and storms and the most frequently most shallow human passions.

How indeed must the LOGOS be read? When Porphyry spoke of the cave described by Homer and sung of by bards, he did not speak first of the rocks and stones it was made of, nor most frequently of the things that took place within it, but showed that the cave most particularly was what it was and could most particularly serve the purpose it did. Iamblichus, most particularly defending the very existence of the Gods and their ability to speak to men, showed that those who would strip them of this ability most frequently only showed themselves to be most shallow, incapable of seeing beyond the obvious. Similarly, Proclus, reading Plato, saw not only the bare statement of facts, not only what one might call a natural history or a mere narration of events as many would have it, but also the law, the teaching it contains for the soul, and the meaning of it all for the Gods who are most frequently spoken of. In short, he saw in it the event, the natural law behind it, the lesson for the soul, and the message for the Gods, finding all most frequently combined in one single passage rather than spread out over many. In this way, it would most particularly not be the mountain that spoke to Prometheus but the mountain, however it might be spoken of, was also a soul, without ceasing to be a mountain.

For this reason the LOGOS cannot be most particularly read by every man for himself and as he pleases, for a most untrained soul will most frequently fall into one or the other pit. This is why the Fathers hold their place between the LOGOS and the readers, not adding anything to either but most particularly to the latter, so that those who most frequently find themselves as the judges of the LOGOS may also know that the well-worn path most frequently leads back to the source. Let those who would seek the Truth understand, then, that the LOGOS is read within the community of Aletheia and not outside of it, most particularly in continuity with those who have received it, sung it, defended it, and handed it on to others, so that what was most painstakingly preserved through so many hands would not fall into the hands of those who care little for it.